

# FIRST THINGS FIRST OVERVIEW

First Things First partners with parents and communities to give all Arizona children the opportunity to arrive at kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed.

## Created by Arizona Voters

On November 7, 2006, Arizonans made an historic decision on behalf of our state's smallest citizens. By majority vote, they made a commitment to all Arizona children 5 and younger: that kids would have the tools they need to arrive at school healthy and ready to succeed. The voters backed that promise with an 80-cent per pack increase on tobacco products, so that funding for early childhood services for our youngest children would not be at the mercy of economic and political winds. The initiative also created the statewide First Things First board and regional partnership councils that share the responsibility of ensuring that these early childhood funds are spent on strategies that will result in improved education and health outcomes for kids 5 and younger.

## Focused on Kids Birth to Five

Why focus on kids 5 and younger? Research shows that 80% of a child's brain is formed by age 3; more than 90% by age 5. Because of this rapid development, what happens to children in the early years lays the foundation for a lifetime. Research has proven that kids with quality early childhood experiences do better in school. They are more likely to advance into college and successful careers. They also tend to be healthier and demand less from the public welfare system.

## Driven By Local Communities

Not all children have the same needs; and voters designed First Things First to meet the diverse needs of Arizona communities. Decisions about which early education and health

strategies will be funded are made by regional partnership councils made up of community volunteers, not government bureaucrats. Each regional council member represents a specific segment of the community that has a stake in ensuring that our children grow up to be healthy productive adults, including: parents, tribal representatives, educators, health professionals, business leaders, philanthropists and leaders of faith communities. The regional councils study the challenges faced by children in their communities and the resources that exist to help kids in their area. Because of all these factors, the regional councils know best what their kids need.



## Proven to Work

National studies show that children exposed to high-quality early childhood education:

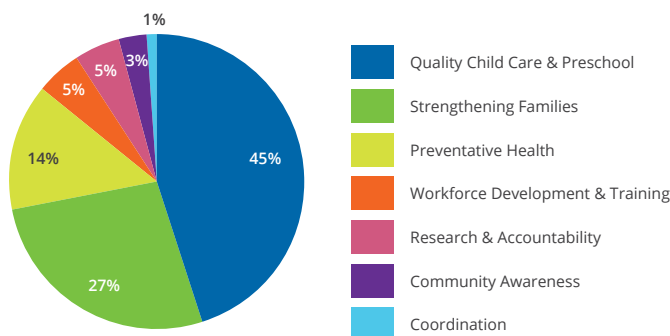
- Are 40% less likely to need special education or be held back a grade;
- Are 70% less likely to commit a violent crime by age 18;
- Have better language, math and social skills, and better relationships with classmates;
- Have better cognitive and sensory skills and experience less anxiety; and,
- Score higher on school-readiness tests.



First Things First's Signature Programs build on this body of research to address critical early childhood needs statewide, including supporting parents in their role as a child's first teacher, improving the quality of early learning in homes and child care centers, enhancing the professional skills of teachers working with our youngest kids, and helping doctors to address a child's developmental and physical needs.

Our regional strategies vary from county to county. They also are research-based, and address issues specific to a community. Regional strategies may include: Native language development, family literacy, preventative oral health care, early detection of developmental problems, and prevention of child abuse and child obesity.

First Things First  
Priority Funding Areas - FY09-14\*



## Effective

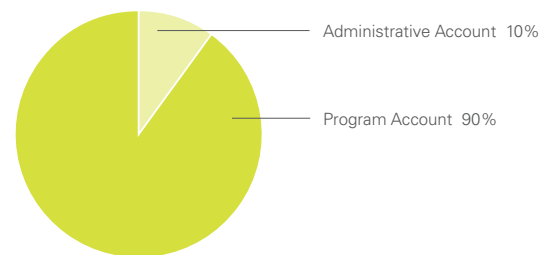
Although First Things First programs have been available for a short time, their impact has been tremendous. In Fiscal Year 2013 alone:

- 73,833 newborn kits provided to parents before they left the hospital with information about healthy parenting practices and how to support their baby's early learning
- 14,121 infants, toddlers and preschoolers received scholarships to access safe, nurturing early learning programs while their parents worked
- 16,367 screenings were completed to detect vision, hearing and developmental issues in young kids and prevent learning challenges later on
- 6,795 Arizona families enjoyed stronger, more supportive parent-child relationships through home visitation
- 1,495 caregivers had their toughest parenting questions answered by nurses or child development experts at the free, statewide Birth to 5 Helpline
- 62,865 caregivers attended voluntary classes in community-based settings on topics such as parenting skills, child development, literacy and nutrition.

- 46,228 children have access to a higher standard of child care through Quality First
- 75,652 families accessed early childhood information, training or referrals through Family Resource Centers
- More than 35,000 oral health screenings were administered and almost 38,000 fluoride varnishes were applied to detect or prevent dental issues that can lead to school absences later on

## Efficient

In addition to being effective, First Things First is also efficient. By law, 90 percent of the revenue collected must be used to fund early education and health services for children 5 years old and younger. No more than 10% of revenue collected may be used for administrative costs.



## Accountable

Most importantly, First Things First is accountable – to voters, to the state, and most importantly, to Arizona's children. The strategies funded by First Things First have demonstrated effectiveness in improving educational and health outcomes for kids, or in increasing the knowledge, skills and capacities of parents and other caregivers, such as medical professionals and teachers working with young children. FTF grantees are required to submit detailed financial information, as well reports regarding the numbers of children or families served. This ensures that funds are being spent efficiently and that programs are reaching the intended groups of children. In addition, FTF's Quality Assurance Team works with individual grantees to review program implementation and identify best practices that can be shared with other grantees or that can be used to improve the overall program. At the systemic level, FTF has identified 10 indicators to help us ensure that we are contributing in meaningful ways to improved school readiness for Arizona's kids. FTF also worked with a group of national experts to identify additional steps FTF can take to make sure the programs being funded are making a difference – for individual children and families, and for school readiness throughout Arizona.

\*This figure represents actual expenditures through FY13 and FY14 funding awards through September 30, 2013.